Building Competences for Knowledge Organisation

By Matt Moore

What do knowledge organisation professionals do?

One thing was obvious from the 2015 IKO conference - KO professionals are engaged in a wide variety of activities. I could list all 15 case studies, as each had something valuable to impart but just a few give a flavour of this diversity:

• The BBC and the National Library Board of Singapore are building frameworks with Linked Data to not only open up their content to the general public but connect their content to other sources to provide a richer and more holistic user experience.

• Search Explained and Flax are applying search technologies both inside and outside the enterprise to make content more accessible for their clients.

• PebbleRoad were out observing how users actually do their jobs rather than just assuming the problems they faced were obvious, and designing apps that connected them to the data needed to support their tasks

• Straits Knowledge was working with graph databases to develop knowledge maps capable of being analysed for taxonomy-building

• Synaptica was building a Linked Data-ready image annotation system so that rich knowledge bases could be built around detailed images.

One way of understanding this complexity is to map out the skills that practitioners require to successfully implement projects like these. Any such mapping attempt will be always be provisional and subject to change. Such a mapping will have to find a balance between between having too little detail to be useful and too much detail to be manageable. And such a mapping faces the risks of any taxonomy that is being applied to taxonomists, such as differences in terminology and organising frameworks.

With these thoughts in mind, we have provisionally grouped the competencies under five broad headings:

1. The first domain was highlighted for me during a series of table sessions on the second day of the IKO Conference. The topic was "KOS maintenance and governance – includes implications for policy". Participants wanted to know how they could make their programs sustainable and demonstrate their value to stakeholders concerned with profit, service excellence or some broader goal. This is the business analysis and project management perspective.

2. Ultimately we are not organising knowledge for its own sake. We are creating these systems to help people achieve their goals (be they work-based or leisure). Understanding what our users are trying to achieve and how they go about their lives should impact the design of our systems.

3. The knowledge that we are trying to organise has not remained static either. We still have paper, we have had electronic documents and data for some time but now we have the fragmentation of unstructured social media and data sets that increase in volume, velocity and variety.

4. The domain getting significant attention at the moment is technology. Technology may enable knowledge organisation systems but they should be treated as separate where possible. Technology is the domain that feels like it is moving the fastest, creating both new opportunities and new risks. Tools like NoSQL, graph databases, and Hadoop are certainly capturing a lot of attention. At the same time, we are still working with considerably older technologies (e.g. relational databases, content management systems) that are not disappearing any time soon.

5. Finally and most obviously would be the knowledge organisation systems themselves - including taxonomies, thesauri, ontologies, metadata standards. Some of these techniques are very mature (e.g. thesauri) and some (e.g. linked open data) have only really arisen in the last decade.

Opportunities for Building Competence

• There are many books, articles and blogs on the topics discussed at the IKO conference. The volumes by Heather Hedden, Marjorie Hlava and Patrick Lambe (referenced below) are all good places to start.

• Often we learn a lot directly from other practitioners. There are plans under way to create a Singapore chapter of the International Society for Knowledge Organisation (www.isko.org) please contact Patrick Lambe for further information.

• Finally, the only way to gain true competence in a domain is to practise it. We would encourage you to identify a topic that you are passionate about, identify a small, achievable project and get started!

To help you identify focus areas for your own development we invite you to fill out an electronic version of the Knowledge Organisation Competency Framework [https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/kocompetencies]. Your response will remain confidential but we plan to compile a summary overview so you can see how you compare to other participants and what the general trends in the sector are. We'll use this survey to identify areas where we can organise training, awareness and networking opportunities. You can also use the survey to volunteer to help other KO professionals in the areas you are most competent in. Don't forget to leave your email address if you'd like to be contacted in this way.

REFERENCES

Patrick Lambe *Organising Knowledge: Taxonomies, Knowledge and Organisation Effectiveness* (Oxford: Chandos 2007)

Heather Hedden *The Accidental Taxonomist* (Medford, NJ: Information Today 2010)

Marjorie M.K. Hlava *The Taxobook (3 volume series)* (San Rafael, CA: Morgan and Claypool Publishers 2015)